



News for Immediate Release

March 22, 2007

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Department of Water Resources Announces Dive Safety Task Force

Sacramento -- Department of Water Resources (DWR) director Lester Snow today announced the formation of an independent expert task force to review the safety of its dive program.

"The safety of our employees is our highest priority," said DWR Director Snow. "This panel of experts will thoroughly examine our dive program and recommend measures we can take to improve the program and avoid future accidents."

Chaired by Jim Stewart, chief diving officer emeritus of Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla, the four-member task force will assess safety practices, equipment, training and diving policies, and make recommendations to Snow. Stewart is uniquely qualified to evaluate the DWR dive program. He was diving officer at Scripps from 1960 until his retirement in 1991, and has trained DWR divers over the years. He has served as diving consultant to NASA, the U.S. Coast Guard, FBI, U.S. Army Special Forces, National Park Service, and many universities nationwide. Though he still holds an office at Scripps Institution, he is acting as an independent consultant on the DWR panel.

Other members of the task force are Frank McGinnis, Fred Aichele and Anthony Traina.

McGinnis is a retired assistant dive coordinator and trainer for Metropolitan Water District whose diving policies are similar to DWR's. He has been teaching diving for 33 years, trains instructors, and is knowledgeable in diving physiology and commercial diving practices.

Aichele is a retired U.S. Navy master diver. Following his 22-year career diving for the Navy, Aichele ran his own commercial diving company and has been a consultant for commercial diving services for the past 24 years. He is a member of West Coast chapter of the Association of Diving Contractors International.

Traina is a Senior Bridge Engineer with the California Department of Transportation. He has been a member of the Caltrans dive team for 14 years and is a dive supervisor.

On February 7, 2007, two DWR divers died while conducting an inspection at the Dos Amigos pumping plant in Merced County. An investigation into the cause of the accident is ongoing.

The Department of Water Resources operates and maintains the State Water Project, provides dam safety and flood control and inspection services, assists local water districts in water management and water conservation planning, and plans for future statewide water needs.

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